

Stefan Gužvica, *Before Tito: The Communist Party of Yugoslavia During the Great Purge (1936–1940)* (Tallinn: University of Tallinn Press, 2020) ISBN 978-9985-58-876-5.

While controversial, the interwar history of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (Komunistička partija Jugoslavije, КПЈ) is a poorly researched period of this political party's existence. The latter half of the 1930s, that is to say, the period of the intra-Party factional struggles following the death of its General Secretary Milan Gorkić and subsequent consolidation under the leadership of Josip Broz Tito stands out the most in this regard. Historian Stefan Gužvica, a doctoral candidate at the Graduate School for East and Southeast European Studies at the University of Regensburg, tackles precisely this segment of the КПЈ's history in his book *Before Tito: The Communist Party of Yugoslavia During the Great Purge (1936–1940)*. This book is based on his master's thesis, which was given the Hanák Prize that the History Department at the Central European University annually awards to its outstanding young researchers.

Focusing on the period of factional struggles in the КПЈ in the years immediately before the beginning of the Second World War, the author seeks to shed light on some aspects of the Party history that have been neglected by the existing historiography and to dispel some revisionist theses that have emerged over the last decades. With this in mind, he conducted an exhaustive inquiry into the published primary sources as well as a detailed archival research that includes an examination of relevant fonds in the Archive of Yugoslavia (Arhiv Jugoslavije, AJ) in Belgrade and in the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (Российский государственный архив социально-политической истории, RGASPI) in Moscow. The later one is particularly significant because the research on this archive has not to date resulted in a comprehensive account of the fall of Milan Gorkić or of the interwar history of the Yugoslav Communist Party. Consequently, the analysis of the documents Gužvica discovered in the RGASPI enabled the author to provide a more complete interpretation of both.

In order to be able to address some of the issues which have hitherto been neglected the author removed Tito from the center of the historical narrative about the Yugoslav Communist Party. Tito still figures quite prominently in Gužvica's interpretation of the events of the late 1930s, to be sure, but the author also provided long-needed attention to the other actors who participated in the factional struggles. He explains how the activities of members of the so-called Parallel Center challenged Tito's Temporary Leadership group, and how Moscow émigré Kamilo Horvatin as well as the political prisoner Petko Miletić and his supporters, the so-called Wahabbis, influenced these struggles. Secondly, the author deemphasizes the consequence of the national question

for the functioning of the Party. This does not mean that he ignores this issue or denies its existence. Rather, he brings it up occasionally when the uncovered documents highlight its pertinence to the Party affairs, but gives space to a number of other matters that guided the Party's work toward achievement of a socialist revolution.

That Gužvica's first two strategic goals are appropriate and well-chosen for the topic at hand shows their compatibility with his major contribution to the history of the KPJ. Namely, the author argues and thoroughly substantiates with documents the claim that the factional struggles did not depend exclusively – or even principally – on the intra-Party relations of the mentioned groups and their actions. Instead, external institutions and organizations such as the Comintern, the Soviet government, the NKVD as well as other European communist parties had a profound effect on the course and outcome of the factional struggles within the KPJ. After all, the factional struggles would certainly have gone differently if Gorkić, General Secretary of the KPJ from 1932, had not perished in Moscow in 1937, and that the same fate did not befall a large number of prominent Yugoslav communists, most of whom were executed between 1937 and 1939 including, for instance, the aforementioned Kamilo Horvatin.

Naturally, Gužvica's pioneering research done in RGSP1 was particularly useful in substantiating this line of research. The majority of the analysis – the main characteristics of Gorkić's rule as well as the possible reasons for his execution in Moscow, the formation of opposing factions and their concrete political activities, implemented policies as well as brazen grappling for power – is permeated with the information discovered in the materials the author located there. The analysis, however, concentrated on embeddedness of the KPJ in the history of international communism, necessarily overlooks local context. Readers who are not familiar with the history of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in the 1930s will be acutely aware of this lack. Therefore, this book is not intended for novices to the field. But all other prospective readers who are interested in this period – the history of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, the history of international communism, or of the Great Purge – will find this book a useful and innovative read that answers many hitherto neglected questions, and which also identifies possible new avenues for scholarly research.

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